

## The Fear of Rejection and Your Career

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

In the legal recruiting realm, a recruiter typically needs to introduce a candidate to more than one law firm in order to get the candidate an interview. You could have a candidate at the top of their class from Harvard Law School practicing at one of the ten largest firms in the United States and they could be rejected by numerous law firms. Why?

- Maybe partners in the law firm do not like Harvard Law School graduates.
- Maybe the law firm does not like the person's last name.
- Maybe the law firm had a bad experience the last time they hired someone from one of the those top ten law firms
- Maybe the law firm would prefer to hire someone related to someone in the firm.

Several years ago I got a call from a law firm after sending them a really strong labor and employment candidate, whom they interviewed.

"Listen, that guy was a waste of our time," the law firm told me.

"Are you kidding?" I started to list off all of the attorney's excellent qualifications and so forth.

"The problem is, he is not black. We are only interested in black attorneys. Our entire labor and employment department is white, and we defend employers in discrimination cases all the time. We need black attorneys."

There are countless reasons why someone might be rejected by a law firm when they are looking for a job and you can never be sure why. Rejection is just part of the game of getting a job. Anytime you want something you risk being rejected.

Several years ago there was a recruiter in one of our recruiting companies who was extremely talented. Candidates liked him and law firms did, as well. He had the potential to be a guy who would do exceptionally well throughout his entire career.

But then a problem arose. The guy was afraid of rejection. He feared rejection so much he would introduce a candidate to a law firm only if he was near 100% positive that the candidate would get an interview. He did not want his candidates to be rejected and he took any rejection of his candidates personally. He would be moping around for hours because the intense feeling of rejection was just more than he could handle.

Because he could not deal with the intensity of his feelings of rejection, he was not as effective as he otherwise would have been in helping his candidates find jobs. In addition, he earned far less money than he would otherwise have earned, due to his irrational anxiety about rejection. He did not end up having the level of success that he should have enjoyed in his career.

One of the most depressing things that I see on an ongoing basis is people with a ton of potential not living up to what they are capable of due to a fear of rejection. Everyone is controlled by a fear of rejection to some extent and how we deal this emotion will generally determine how successful we are in our careers, and lives.

Emotions control our lives. Most of what we do is driven by emotion. We purchase things because we believe they will make us feel a certain way. We take vacations because we think they will make us feel a certain way. People use substances, including drugs, because they think it will make them feel a certain way. You spend your time with various people because you think they will make you feel a certain way.

Much of what we do is based on various emotions. Emotions are incredibly powerful. Emotions control how countries behave, they control who we marry and just about every other thing. If you were to take a close look, you might even say that our history is the history of emotions.

Throughout your career, the odds are very good that you will seek to avoid rejection in some way. Rejection may bring up deep seated fears of:

- loneliness
- discomfort
- hurt -- pain
- anger
- frustration
- disappointment
- guilt
- regret
- inadequacy
- overwhelmed
- depression

There is nothing wrong with avoiding various emotions; however, it is important to understand that seeking to avoid rejection can significantly hold you back, as in the example of the recruiter who feared rejection. He would have been far more effective had he been able to deal with this emotion.

You may avoid certain types of work, or certain people. One of the most important components of your success is managing your fear of rejection and making it work for you, instead of against you.

The way you feel about your work at any given time is generally a product of the meaning you attach to it. A person may fail, but they may still feel good because they made the effort. Another person may get depressed.

Anytime you find yourself fearing rejection, recognize that allowing this fear to control you will forever limit your potential. You will achieve far more in your career by powering through the fear of rejection.

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<https://www.harrisonbarnes.com/>